

WILMETTE, IL – With the holiday season already here, Congressman Mark Kirk and 10th District high school students launched a program to collect key items wanted by Americans serving in Afghanistan and Iraq. Through Operation Support Our Troops Illinois, a nonprofit volunteer-based organization, students at Loyola Academy and Highland Park High School put together holiday care packages filled with goods that are in short supply for many soldiers. At the event, the students packed boxes with donated items including 1,000 compact discs and canned goods.

“As we celebrate the holidays, it is important to keep Americans who wear the uniform overseas in our prayers,” Congressman Kirk said. “The students at Loyola Academy and Highland Park High School set a leadership example for donating more than 300 stockings filled with holiday goods. There is no better way to let a soldier or marine know you care than by sending them the comforts of home, particularly during the holidays when they are far from families.”

Joining the students and Congressman Kirk were Deb Rickert, President of Operation Support Our Troops Illinois and two servicemen from the 75th Army Division located at Fort Sheridan in Highland Park – Lieutenants Justin Moore and John Vosnos. Lieutenant Vosnos, a Vernon Hills resident, was deployed to Iraq from 2005 – 2006 and discussed the importance that care packages play in boosting morale.

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Operation Support Our Troops Illinois shipped more than 13,000 boxes to men and women serving in Afghanistan and Iraq, with more than 5,000 sent just this year. Due to lengthy shipping times, most holiday packages to Iraq and Afghanistan have already been sent. “Support Our Troops needs a variety of non-holiday themed goods for year-round use. Support Our Troops identified a top ten “wish list” for donations,” Kirk said. These include:

1. Peanut butter (20 oz. or less, please) and jelly (20 oz. or less; plastic only, please)
2. Crackers (standard 14.4 box) to put peanut butter or tuna on
3. Canned fruit, canned pasta (ravioli, ready to eat soups)
4. Beef jerky/Slim Jims
5. Nuts in a 20 oz. or less container; no glass please
6. Coffee (tea bag style of coffee or packets such as from a hotel, 1 # ground coffee), hot cider packets, etc.
7. Bag items * (see full list below)
8. Unscented baby wipes, toilet paper

9. Crew socks (men's size 10 to 13, without sewn-on logo, white or black)
10. Mints, spices in plastic jar, individual mayo packets (sold in a box at Costco, Sams, etc.)

The full list of recommended items is included below. Individuals interested in donating goods can drop them off at Congressman Kirk's Northbrook office at 707 Skokie Blvd., Suite 350. For more information, visit the Operation Support Our Troops Illinois Web site at <http://www.osotil.org/>

Operation Support Our Troops ~ Illinois "Wish List"

TOP TEN LIST:

1. Peanut butter (20 oz. or less, please) & jelly (20 oz. or less; plastic only, please)
2. Crackers (Standard 14.4 box) to put peanut butter or tuna on
3. Canned fruit, canned pasta (ravioli, ready to eat soups) CRITICAL
4. Beef jerky/Slim Jims (Troops love this) CRITICAL
5. Nuts in a 20 oz. or less container; no glass please
6. Coffee (Tea bag style of coffee or packets such as from a hotel, 1 # ground coffee), hot cider packets, etc.
7. Bag items * (see full list below)
8. Unscented baby wipes, toilet paper
9. Crew socks (men's size 10 to 13, without sewn-on logo, white or black)
10. Mints, spices in plastic jar, individual mayo packets (sold in a box at Costco, Sams, etc.)

BAGGED ITEMS

Dental bag items

Dental floss

Individual packets of toothbrushes

Mouthwash

Toothpaste

Chapstick

Medical bag items:

Eye drops
Saline nasal spray
Large Band-Aids
Anti-itch cream (2 oz. or less)
Antibiotic ointment (e.g. Neosporin)
Antacid relief tablets (e.g. of Tums)
Vitamins (multi or C,200 count or less)
Over the counter allergy/cold/flu medicine (capsule and tablet form mails the best)
Muscle rub (such as Ben Gay)
"Hot Hands"

Pain relievers (Advil, Tylenol, Motrin)
Heat wraps (i.e. Thermacare Lowback Heat Wrap)
Q-Tips (a large handful in a snack bag)

Shower bag items
Shaving cream
Deodorant
Hand lotion (no pump tops please)
Hand sanitizer (no pump tops please)
Body wash (16 oz or smaller—no bars of soap, please)

Foot Care Bag Items
Socks – Men's White or Black Crew Socks
Foot powder (20 oz or less)
Moleskin and/or blister pads
Small flat package of unscented wipes (diaper bag size)

MORE FOOD ITEMS APPRECIATED

- Granola bars
- Individually wrapped snack items—peanut butter & crackers, cheese & crackers, cookies, & nuts
- Cereal (small individual boxes please) and cereal bars
- Instant oatmeal or grits (indiv. packaged) and Pop Tarts
- Mints (Altoids, Lifesavers, TicTacs, Starlight mints)
- Raisins, dried fruit, trail mix
- Nuts in canisters or plastic jars
- Spices

- Canned pasta (ravioli, beef-a-roni, ready to eat soup)
- Ramen noodles in the flat packages
- Canned meat such as tuna, chicken or turkey

Canned tuna or meat

Individual mayo and tuna in a snack bag

Standard size box of crackers to put tuna on (such as Ritz, Saltines)

Tuna lunch kits to go

Cold drink mix packets for bottled water (such as Crystal Lite To Go) and powdered Gatorade

Pringles (in a tall canister)

MORE NON FOOD ITEMS APPRECIATED:

Sunday comics

Men's magazines (within the last 6 months please)

DVD movies that men would enjoy

Music CDs

Hotel size samples of shampoo, body wash, lotion, coffee and sewing kit

Write a letter and/or 'Thank You' card (make copies)

CDs and DVDs (new or used)

Toilet paper (single & double rolls)

Laundry detergent tablets

Dryer fabric soften sheets (box of approx. 80 dryer sheets)

Fabreeze

Writing home bag items

New pencils, mechanical pencils

Blank birthday cards for soldier to send home

5" x 7" tablets of writing paper

Puzzle books (crossword, word search & Suduko)

AT&T International phone cards

Fill every nook and cranny items

Disposable cameras

Pocket packs of tissues

Batteries (AA & AAA)
Playing cards
Granola and rice krispy bars (store bought please)
Microwave popcorn
Individually wrapped bags of peanuts & other nuts
Slim jims

Help to restock our bags
Gallon ziplock (critical shortage)
Quart ziplock
Sandwich ziplock
Snack ziplock (critical shortage)

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